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ABSTRACT

The necessity to provide instruction in reading is widespread in community colleges, due primarily to the liberal enrollment policies these colleges generally have. The program at San Jose City College uses the Davis Reading Test and the Iowa Silent Reading Test as part of its entrance battery and assigns students to either regular or one of two noncredit, pass-fail, remedial English classes on the basis of scores on the speed section of the Davis test. Regular English instructors, reading teachers, and graduate students in English acting as paraprofessionals teach the remedial reading and writing sections. Emphasis is on skill development, beginning with isolated skill areas and working toward integration of skills in successful critical reading. Machines such as tachistoscopes and language masters supplement class instruction, and the use of clozure activities to strengthen vocabulary and comprehension has been particularly successful. Evaluation of 310 students in remedial sections in the spring of 1970 showed an average gain of nearly 2 years as measured by the Iowa test. Future plans for the program include extending instruction into various departments of the college. References are included. (MS)

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Clozing the Gap: An Approach to Solving Reading Problems at San Jose City College

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The dilemma of why Johnny can't read is magnified over a thousand times each year at San Jose City College. A number of years ago this problem was recognized and steps were taken to remedy it. Basing their early program on the philosophy that there exists a tight correlation between reading and writing ability the English Department established a tracking system which works as follows. All students who scored below 27 on the speed section of the Davis Reading Test, administered as part of the entrance battery, were placed in two compulsory English classes; English C, a remedial reading class, and English D, a remedial writing class. Upon successful completion of both classes the student was then permitted to take English 92, an advanced remedial composition class, and then the regular college freshman composition class, English 1A. Both English C and D were established as non-credit pass/fail courses which met three times a week in classes of 30. Regular English instructors taught both the C and D sections in spite of the fact that none have had any training in the teaching of reading. Emphasis in the reading sections was heaviest on speed and comprehension, and normally a speed and

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comprehension score was obtained during each class session. In addition to the Controlled Reader and reading pacers, various SRA kits and books were the foundations for this course. Unfortunately, the success of this approach was somewhat limited. Needs of individual students were subordinated to the focus on speed and comprehension, and many of the weaker students became frustrated and dropped the course.

Two years ago the idea of using para-professionals under the supervision of a reading specialist was proposed, and the present reading program began. San Jose City College has a combined day/evening enrollment of approximately 13,000 students. During the current school year our English C program will have served over 1200 students in sections of from 15 to 33. With the exception of four sections taught in the evening by regularly credentialed instructors the remaining sections have all been taught by para-professionals working under my direct supervision. Each of our para-professionals possesses or is within 6 units of possessing an MA in English from San Jose State. None of them has had any formalized training in the teaching of reading. Prior to beginning work in our reading program they have attended a series of seminars dealing with various aspects of reading diagnosis and instruction. In addition, we meet twice a month to discuss readings assigned in various texts purchased for this purpose, and we have been fortunate to have obtained the services of Dr. Miles A. Tinker as a consultant last year. As part of my assignment I am present in each section for ten to fifteen minutes, during which time I evaluate instruction, help individual students, and sometimes teach demonstration lessons. These evaluations are used during our frequent informal conferences as a basis for suggesting change or to give direction to future lesson planning. During the present semester we have four para-professionals involved in the program, each of whom

has three sections of English C.

The speed section of the Davis Reading Test is still being used for placing students in the various English classes, as was noted earlier. However, we are currently involved in a study to determine a better way to place students as well as to test the validity of the assumption that reading and writing expertise is somehow related. Pending the results of this study we shall continue to use the Davis. Unfortunately, these scores reflect achievement in an area of dubious value for selection of students who are supposedly remedial readers, and the result is that we wind up with 30 students who are assigned to the same reading class but who in fact have widely varied skills and problems. In an effort to minimize this problem we have been using the Iowa Silent Reading Test as both a diagnostic aid and for pre-post test results to assess the effectiveness of our program. During the first two class sessions of the semester the Iowa is administered. We take the results and then reassign students according to areas of greatest need as indicated by the scores. When there are three sections per hour, as we have during the Fall semester, we normally have one section which deals with word attack, including both syllabication and phonics (disguised as spelling), literal comprehension skills, and practice in reading such things as maps, charts, and graphs, as well as basic study skills. The middle sections normally emphasize vocabulary development through the use of roots, prefixes and suffixes, interpretive comprehension, some rate training, and study skills. The top sections deal with developing flexible reading rates, critical reading skills as well as practice in all aspects of comprehension, and study skills. During the Spring semester when our enrollment drops we normally have only two sections per hour. The

division usually has the slower sections doing work on word attack, practical reading of maps, graphs, and charts, vocabulary development, study skills, and comprehension, while the faster sections deal with rate of reading, comprehension, critical reading skills, study skills, and vocabulary development.

Because of the size of our sections our class work is necessarily conducted in the form of group assignments. We are currently using Free to Read by Bamman and Opportunity for Skillful Reading by Joffe as the basic texts. These texts are supplemented with a variety of other materials including SRA's Better Reading books, Witty's You Can Be A Better Reader, and the books which accompany the Controlled Reader, which we use to teach preview techniques as well as to give practice in reading for speed and comprehension. As far as mechanical equipment is concerned, we have a tachistoscope, which is used two or three times per semester in each section to demonstrate visual span concepts and to motivate the students to try and read in thought groups rather than word-by-word. We have a number of Language Masters which are extremely valuable in helping students to become more fluent readers. These machines are so popular that we allow students to check them out overnight and weekends to practice with at home.

Finally, we use clozure to strengthen vocabulary and comprehension in a most impressive manner as well as to involve the students in the learning process. Bormuth (3), Rankin (6) and others have conducted studies on the utility of clozure in evaluating comprehension. Bloomer (1), Heitzman (5) Roossinch (7) and Schneyer (8) have found that this procedure is valuable in teaching as well as diagnosis. Our utilization of clozure at City College has been as a teaching device rather than for diagnostic

purposes. For this an instructor will select an article which he feels might be of interest to the class and systematically delete words, leaving in place of the words a blank of standardized length so the student will be unable to tell whether the word was long or short. Commonly we leave out every fifth or seventh word, but it is possible to vary this according to the nature of the material, the competencies of the students, and what you are attempting to teach them. For example, it works very successfully if you leave out parts of speech, such as every verb or adjective. We have also deleted numerical measures, as in recipes. The concept behind clozure is that if the student is familiar with a situation being described he should, from his own experience as well as the context, be able to supply the missing words used by the author in the original text, or at least words which made sense within the context. We sometimes collect these exercises, which are normally duplicated and distributed to each student. However, our more common procedure is to wait until each student has completed his paper and then place him in a group of six or eight to discuss their word choices. Each group is told to come up with a polished copy consisting of the best choice for each blank as mutually decided by the entire group. In listening to these discussions we frequently hear a great deal of critical thinking being expressed, as well as discussion of such things as style and tone, although these exact terms may not be used. Finally, after each group has completed a polished copy the class reconvenes and each group tries to justify its choices when there is a difference. One of the obvious benefits of this approach is that it permits each student to learn from his peers the shades of meaning various words can carry in a specific context. The discussions which center

around some of the word choices are frequently spirited and noisy as each student develops an awareness of the importance of knowing what each word means. To illustrate how well this approach works consider the following example. One of the para-professionals had been working with clozure quite frequently last semester, often once a week. Seeing that her students were becoming very proficient at supplying meaning from context, she passed out a copy of Carroll's "Jabberwocky" as a present. The immediate reaction from the class was silence and stoney faces. However, as the poem was read to them a few began to smile, and by the end all looked as though they had comprehended at least part of the poem. In the discussion which followed it was amazing to listen to various students affix meanings to such words as "slithy" and "vorpal," and even more impressive to find that they could identify these words according to function. This they were able to do because of Carroll's use of standardized English prefixes and suffixes. To top this off, one of the students composed a song entitled "Jabberwocky Man" which his rock group played at a concert in December. The potential of clozure as an instructional aid is both enormous and terribly exciting.

Turning now to results, we have what we feel are some fairly impressive gains using this approach. The typical English C student enrolled in the program during the Spring 1970 semester gained 1 year 9 months as measured by the overall score on the Iowa Silent Reading Test, using Advanced Form CM for the pre-test and Advanced Form DM for the post-test. In compiling these statistic n-310 students.

	%ile	
	Form CM	Form DM
Rate	31	62
Comprehension	20	41
Directed Reading	20	25
Poetry Comprehension	16	28
Vocabulary	13	21
Sentence Comprehension	9	19
Paragraph Comprehension	18	27
Use of the Index	19	31
Selection of Key Words	30	42
Overall Score	13	32

	Grade Level Score	
Overall Score	8.2	10.1

While we are pleased with these results we feel that there are many things which we can do to strengthen our program. For example, we have a large number of Chicano students for whom English is a second language. None of us is adequately trained to deal with this problem in the most efficient manner, so we lean on our Cooperative Learning Program which supplies us with student tutors. I try and work with the most severely handicapped readers on an individualized basis, which is seldom possible because of time. Our counseling department is working on the development of a study skills course which will be of enormous value to many of our students. Members of various departments, including history, cosmetology, and home economics, have asked for help in preparing materials and lessons for students who are having difficulty in reading assigned materials in those courses. Still, we are faced with a one semester course which carries no credit and which most students

pass because they do show significant improvement on the Iowa test. A student who begins the semester reading at the fifth grade level and finishes the course reading at the seventh grade level does not need to repeat the course. At this point we offer nothing else for him. We do have a separate speed reading course, but this is inappropriate for the type of student taking English C. It is gratifying to have a dozen or more students each semester who voluntarily repeat the course because they felt it helped them, but we need something more. We obviously need a lab set-up in which we could deal with our most severely handicapped readers. Although we do reach large numbers of students each semester we are painfully aware of our failure to adequately deal with the most severely handicapped in a more effective manner. We need to develop a sequence of courses so that it would be possible for a student to move from the sixth grade level of reading competency to the eighth or ninth or tenth, if this be the potential for that individual. We need to consider assigning credit to these courses. We need to develop a more reliable and up-to-date testing instrument so that we might be more tuned in to the needs of each student.

In the meantime we shall continue with our present program, making any modifications which seem necessary or desirable and which won't cost any money, since we are faced with a very tight budget for the coming year. Looking back on these two years there is a tendency to feel smug, because what we have now is so obviously superior to what existed on campus three or four years ago. Despite the fact that we have succeeded in clozing the gap during this time we must seek other ways to come even closer to helping each of our students realize his potential.

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